

VZCZCXRO0977

OO RUEHAG RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD  
RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHSL RUEHSR RUEHTM  
DE RUEHMU #1091/01 3241419  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 201419Z NOV 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0161  
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001091

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA  
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/20

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: Nicaragua's November 21 Dueling Marches, Some Violence  
Likely

REF: A) MANAGUA 794; B) MANAGUA 232; C) MANAGUA 35  
D) 08 MANAGUA 1405; E) 08 MANAGUA 1393; F) 08 MANAGUA 1328  
G) 08 MANAGUA 1195; H) 08 MANAGUA 1057; I) 08 MANAGUA 1049  
J) 08 MANAGUA 1035

MANAGUA 00001091 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: RobertJ.Callahan, Ambassador, State, US Embassy  
Managua; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: On Saturday, November 21, civil society together with opposition parties will march on the streets of Managua to protest the 2008 municipal election fraud and the re-election of President Daniel Ortega. On the same day (and on nearby streets) the governing Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) will be marching to celebrate its "victory" in the 2008 municipal elections. The FSLN already has begun to employ its tactics of intimidation to suppress opposition turnout the day of the march, and will use government coffers for its own logistics on November 21. Meanwhile, civil society and opposition parties will be challenged by the task of amassing large crowds the day of the march. While the general public rejects the election fraud and Ortega's re-election, due to past violence there is a sense of fear in publicly protesting, especially if the FSLN will be nearby. The police, whose actions have been questioned in past marches, also have become a central figure in the November 21 events. Police Commissioner Aminta Granera has personally taken charge of the day, and is placing the legitimacy of her institution (and herself) on the spot. The announced marches have led to heightened tensions in Nicaragua's already politically divided population. This along with the violence in recent protest marches has led to the popular belief that at least some violence is likely on November 21. End Summary.

Civil Society Calls a March, FSLN Announces Countermarch

12. (C) On November 9 a group of 18 civil society organizations (the Citizens' Union for Democracy, UCD) called for a march on November 21 to commemorate and protest the 2008 municipal election fraud and protest Ortega's re-election efforts (ref J). The UCD previously had received the necessary permit from the police and the police had informed them that no other group had requested permits for that day in that (or an adjacent) location. Following

the announcement of the march, all major opposition political parties have joined the call for the march. Leaders of the opposition who have stated they will participate include National Assembly Deputy and former presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre and former President Arnaldo Aleman.

¶3. (C) On November 10, FSLN National Assembly Deputy (and close confidant to Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo) Gustavo Porras announced that his party would celebrate the first anniversary of the "Sandinista victory" in the municipal elections. The FSLN had not yet applied for a permit, but announced their march would follow the same route as that of the UCD's march. Porras stated that his National Labor Front (FNT) along with other FSLN-affiliated organizations would occupy Managua's rotundas and streets because the streets "belonged to them." True to his word, as of November 19 FSLN sympathizers were occupying the rotunda that will serve as the starting point for the UCD march; these sympathizers were also throwing rocks at local media that drove by the rotunda. Porras claimed that through the various FSLN structures, his party will bring 100,000 people to demonstrate their support for Ortega's government on November 21. Members of civil society and the opposition note the FSLN uses public resources and forces public employees to attend the party's activities and will do so again to reach the 100,000 mark. The FSLN has publicized its march on television, radio and internet news websites. The governing party's advertisements significantly outnumber those of the UCD's march.

MANAGUA 00001091 002.2 OF 003

#### Intimidation Tactics Begin, Violence Expected

¶4. (C) Even before the November 2008 municipal elections, the FSLN had responded to what it viewed as "opposition" protests with violence and used this as an intimidation tactic to suppress further acts of protests. Their intolerance recently resulted in the beating and kidnapping of opposition youth in Managua and Leon (ref H, I). Since the announcement of the marches, their intimidation tactics have continued both directly and indirectly. In the early morning of November 11, government supporters defaced the homes of civil society and opposition members in Leon, using material from the Leon City Hall. Similar incidents were reported in Managua. FSLN Political Secretary (and former head of security in the FSLN government of the 1980s) Lenin Cerna held a private meeting with members of the transportation unions, where it was suspected he might have discussed mechanisms to disrupt the UCD November 21 march. FSLN political secretaries from departments publicly have stated the party would block the opposition's November 21 march, and media reported the FSLN would use improvised weapons to block access to Managua from other parts of Nicaragua. The mere mention that the FSLN will have 100,000 supporters the day of the march is viewed by civil society and the opposition as a mechanism to try and intimidate the UCD marchers. Given the FSLN's recent history in violently suppressing protests (ref A, B, C, E, F, G), the party is surely relying on intimidation tactics to suppress turnout on November 21.

¶5. (C) Nonetheless, civil society and opposition parties argue that the people's fear is beginning to abate, and they expect people to attend the Saturday march. Both sides have publicly stated their marches are peaceful, but both sides also appear to be preparing for other scenarios. It is widely expected that the FSLN will use the makeshift weapons and former gang members it has employed in the past. In attempts to encourage its own turnout, opposition leaders have publicly stated that they will respond in kind to any acts of violence from the FSLN. In private, members of the opposition have told us that their people will be armed with the same tools the FSLN usually carries - namely sling shots, improvised hand-held projectile devices ("morteros"), and other makeshift weapons. The likelihood of violence increased when the police publicly stated that the use of "morteros" (illegal under

Nicaraguan law) would be permitted. The UCD quickly responded asking the police to ban these weapons, as they have inflicted injuries and damage in past marches.

16. (C) Given the past violence and this heightened tension, religious and private sector leaders have called for peaceful marches on November 21. In a joint letter to President Ortega, the presidents of the Higher Council of the Private Sector (COSEP) and the American-Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) advised Ortega that it was in his hands to avoid confrontations at the marches and that past violence had only negatively affected private investment. Nicaragua's Conference of Bishops issued a statement November 18, in which it expressed its concern over the threats to fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of expression and assembly. The bishops then called on Ortega and other political leaders to reject and condemn any attempts to repress the freedom of expression and assembly. Evangelical leaders have made similar calls for peaceful, nonviolent marches.

#### Police on the Spot

17. (C) On November 21, Police Commissioner Aminta Granera and her institution will be put to the test. Given their recent track

MANAGUA 00001091 003.2 OF 003

record of passivity in protecting people's basic rights and freedoms (ref D), Granera has very publicly taken the lead of the institution's efforts to ensure a peaceful November 21. Appearing to have conceded to the FSLN's march plans (despite being subsequent to the UCD march plans), Granera was publicly criticized for asking the UCD to change its route for November 21. In a November 18 press conference, the commissioner and her senior staff presented the police's plan for the day of the marches. They discussed the two routes for the marches, explained that the police would serve as buffers at certain points throughout the march, and stated that the police would provide security to those traveling from outside Managua. Publicly the organizers of the UCD march have stated they place their trust in the commissioner, but many doubts persist on whether or not the police will function effectively the day of the marches. While Granera might wish to avoid violence, questions remain as to how much control she has over her own institution. One security analyst said that within the police there is a corporate mentality to obey the political directives of the FSLN - i.e., Ortega and not Granera.

#### Comment

18. (C) The FSLN violence over the past year has for the most part been effective for the governing party in that people are not likely to publicly protest against the government. However, people's fears are increasingly dissipating and they more regularly speak of "an eye for an eye." This combined with the increased rhetoric from both sides in the lead-up to the November 21 marches and the police's decision to allow "morteros" has placed a blanket of uncertainty (and insecurity) over the events of November 21. A big factor in what actually happens will be the ability for UCD marchers to reach Managua from other departments. Police Commissioner Granera's public statements and visible role in the days ahead of the march also make clear that Saturday will be a clear test for her and her institution. While the likelihood for violence is high on November 21, Nicaragua is always full of surprises and anything can happen - even a peaceful march.

CALLAHAN